THE MASK

Sam Kieth • William Messner-Loebs

THE MAXIMIZED

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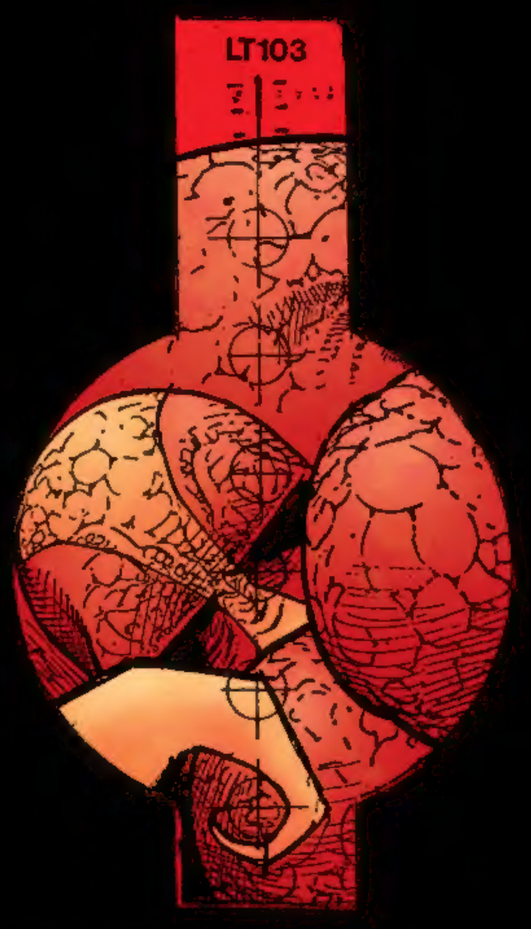


"A BIT MORE TO THE LEFT... MORE... MORE... THERE.

"NOW DOWN... FURTHER...

"AHHH. PERFECT. THAT'S HIS ACCURSED CLAW... THE ONE THAT ALMOST...

"NOW I WANT TO SEE HIS OTHER CLAW, TO BROOD OVER HIM AS HE SLEEPS, JUST AS HE BROODED OVER ME AS I LAY HELPLESS, POWERLESS BEFORE HIS BESTIAL WRATH!"

HEY, MAXX! WAKE UP!

"NO, YOU IDIOT! THAT'S HER OTHER FOOT!

"BRING THE SCANNER DOWN!

"NOT UP! DOWN... DOWN!

"THAT'S BETTER. NOW I CAN THINK.

"NOW I CAN PLAN!"

IT'S THE SAME *EVERY* SATURDAY MORNING. YOU CURL UP WATCHING *CARTOONS* AND FALL *ASLEEP!*

AND WHAT CARTOONS? THE *CRAPPON INNA HAT!* MUST BE THE STUPIDEST CARTOON EVER MADE!

I MEAN..."*THE CRAPPON INNA HAT TEAMS UP WITH JEAN-PAUL SARTRE TO FIGHT NAUSEA!*" CARTOONS TODAY ARE SO PRETENTIOUS!

AHA!

I COULD BLOW THEM BOTH AWAY FROM HERE! NOT THAT I WOULD, OF COURSE. I DON'T OPERATE THAT WAY! STILL...

WILL YOU CUT THAT OUT? EVERYBODY KNOWS !SZ DON'T HAVE EYEBALLS!

THHRRRRP!

MEEEP

MEEP

MEEP

MEEEEEEE

MEEP

MA-DEEP

OKAY, BIG GUY. YOU SLEEP.

IT'S NOT LIKE A *WACKY CARTOON* IS GONNA INFECT YOUR *BRAIN* OR SOMETHING. I'LL MAKE US SOME COCOA.

JUST DON'T *FALL* IN, OKAY?

THAT'S *ALL* I NEED, FOR YOU TO TURN INTO SOME KINDA STUPID *CARTOON*...

SOME

KINDA

STUPID

CARTOON?

DON'T

FALL

IN

OKAY?

HELLO.

YES, HELLO TO ME...

AND HELLO TO *YOU!*

I AM THE *CRAPPON*

I LIVE IN THE *ZOO!*

AND IT'S SUCH A FRIENDLY OLD ZOO

AND SUCH *FUN*...

YOU ALL WILL ENJOY IT... YES, YOU WILL, EVERY *ONE!*

EVERY *TWO* WILL ENJOY IT... EVERY *THREE*... EVERY *FOUR*...

SO COME VISIT MY ZOO, CURL UP ON THE FLOOR

WE'LL BE FRIENDLY AS BUGS... SO COME ON, I IMPLORE!

CRAPPON
CREATED BY
DAVE FEISS

OR IF YOU PREFER TO CURL UP IN A DUMPSTER

FESTOONED WITH OLD GARBAGE

I WON'T SAY YOU CAN'T, SIR.

JUST LEAN BACK ...RELAX... IN THAT SMELLY OLD BIER

AND ENJOY OUR SHOW...

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

I WAS JUST AT JULIE'S... I'M SURE THAT I WAS.

AND WHY AM I SURE THAT I WAS...? JUST BECAUSE!

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME?

I'M OFF-MODEL AND FLATTER! I'VE BEEN OUTLINED AND BLUE-LINED... THAT'S WHAT'S THE MATTER!

AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S *WORSE*, MAXX? YOUR *FACE'S* A *DISGRACE!*

WHO SAID THAT? AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'BOUT MY FACE?

MY COLORS ARE BRIGHTER, MY MOVEMENT'S PRE-SCREENED, I'VE BEEN STORYBOARDED AND I'VE BEEN IN-BETWEENED!

IT'S *MISPLACED!*

MY FACE...?

IT'S RIGHT HERE, IT IS UNDER THIS MASK...

JUST BE VERY SURE... THAT'S THE MOST THAT I ASK!

I AM SURE... SAY, YOU'RE A FISH, IN A BOWL MADE OF GLASS!

YEP, THAT'S THE PLOT... NOW I'D SAY YOU SHOULD *RUN!*

PRETTY WISE! WHO ARE THESE GUYS, SON?

THEY'RE YOUR *FEARS*, THEY'RE YOUR *TERRORS* AND THEY LIVE IN A CAVE...

IN THE *PIT* OF YOUR PSYCHE AND THEY *ALL* ARE NAMED *DAVE!*

ALL ARE NAMED DAVE? WHAT DO THEY WANT WITH ME?

TO *RIP* OFF THAT *MASK*, SO YOUR *FACE* ALL CAN SEE!

MY FACE? NO! THEY CAN'T! THEY CAN'T DO THAT TO MEEEEEEE

I'M AFRAID THAT THEY CAN. AND I'M A GUY WHO SHOULD KNOW.

YOU SEE, I'M THE CRAPPON... AND THIS IS MY SHOW!

AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'NEATH THAT MASK... I JUST KNOW!

THAT'S NOT TRUE! I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST ANIMATED!

BUT I'M JUST AS REAL AS YOU ARE...MAYBE REALER.

EACH LINE THAT DEFINES ME IS CAREFULLY WEIGHTED.

THIS IS JUST A MAD JAIL AND YOU'RE THE MAD JAILER.

I AM THE MAXX! I CANNOT BE HELD!

BY ONE WHO'S DECIPHERED WHAT'S UNDER YOUR MASK! DO YOU WANT TO KNOW...? WELL, DO YOU? JUST ASK!

SUCH MINOR REBELLIONS ARE EASILY QUELLED...

AND THIS GUY'S THE *POOP*...

AND THIS ONE'S THE *SNOT*. I'D SAY HE'S THE *DOPE*, BUT HE'S *NOT*...

I KNOW IT ALL, AND TO PROVE THAT I DO, THIS DUDE'S THE *STRAIGHT SKINNY*. HE'S HEAD OF MY CREW.

NO, HE'S *SNOT*!

FRIEND FISH, THEY ARE TRYING TO TEAR OFF MY MASK... TO SHOW ME THE THING THAT I'M FRIGHTENED TO ASK... PLEASE GIVE ME ADVICE. I'M BEGGING YOU, PLEASE...

THAT FISH IS YOUR *CONSCIENCE*, AND SHE'S WHEEZED HER LAST *WHEEZE*!

YOU'RE ALL *ALONE*, MAXX... YOUR *MISSIONS* FORGOT. THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN REMEMBER IS *SNOT*! YOUR FACE IS A FIGMENT OF A MAN WITH NO *HEAD*!

YOUR MASK IT IS *EVIL* AND YOUR *FISH*... IT IS *DEAD*!

MY MASK IS NOT EVIL! IT'S A CLEVER DISGUISE!

I CHOSE IT TO HIDE FROM THE PRYINGEST EYES.

SO I COULD DO GOOD! AND MY FISH IS NOT DEAD!

MY FISH IS ALIVE!

THIS IS NOT IN MY HEAD!

EEEKS! MY FEARS HAVE RETURNED!

IT IS TIME THAT I BOOKED!

I COULD FACE MY FACE! IT IS TIME THAT I LOOKED!

BUT MY FACE ISN'T HUMAN. OF THAT I AM SURE!

IT'S THE MOST HORRID, HORRIBLE THING TO OCCUR. AND IT'S COVERED BY SCALES OR IT'S COVERED BY FUR!

IT COULD BE A BEAR'S HEAD

OR MAYBE AN OWL!

IT COULD LOOK LIKE FISH EGGS, LAID ON WITH A TROWEL!

SOMETHING GROTESQUE... SOMETHING MOST FOUL!

LIKE THE FINS OF A SHARK WRAPPED IN SOME-BODY'S BOWEL!

THIS IS GETTING QUITE DEEP, AND I'M STARTING TO FEAR... I'LL BE DROWNED IN AN OCEAN OF DIET ROOT BEER...

DIET ROOT BEER?

YES, THAT'S WHAT IT SEEMED.

I'VE FLASHED BACK TO MY DUMPSTER. SO ALL THIS WAS A DREAM?

NO, I GUESS NOT. FOR THESE GUY'S ARE STILL HERE...

STILL RIPPING...

AND TRIPPING ME, AND WHAT I FEAR...

...IS IF THESE GUYS KILL ME...

...AND MAKE ME ROLL OVER...

...I'LL BE JUST AS DEAD...

...BACK ON JULIE'S OLD SOFA.

CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA CHEW-BALLA

OH, YIPE.

AND MY FISH IS BOUND TOO IN HER BOWL MADE OF GLASS...

YIPE AGAIN AND ONCE AGAIN YIPE!

THESE FEARS ALL NAMED DAVE HAVE ME TRUSSED LIKE A SNIPE!

BUT BOWLS CAN CUT ROPE, IF THEY'RE CAREFULLY SMASHED!

I'M SURROUNDED BY FEARS. THERE'S JUST ONE THING TO DO!

I MUST FACE WHAT THE FEARS MAKE ME FEARFUL TO DO.

I MUST RIP OFF THIS MASK! IT IS TIME THAT I KNEW...

...WHAT LIES BENEATH... IT IS BEANS?

IT IS PODS! WHAT A STRANGE THING TO DO.

TO KEEP SEEDS IN MY FACE... AND HOW ODD!

FOR AS THESE SEEDS FALL, PUNCHING HOLES THROUGH THE LIGHT...

THEY SMITE AND COLLIDE, IN A DESPERATE FIGHT...

TO BE FIRST IN THE SOIL, WHICH ERUPTS IN A COIL OF TREES, VINES AND GRASSES, ALL BROUGHT TO A BOIL. THIS IS CREATION, AND THE LAND THAT EMERGES IS ONE I REMEMBER! MY MEMORY SURGES!

THIS LAND I RULE! I SCREAM TO THE SKY! THIS PLACE NEEDS A TARZAN AND I AM THAT GUY!

WAIT! IT IS DIFFERENT SOMEHOW. THIS LAND ISN'T MINE!

AND MY BRAIN HAS BEEN FREED! I'M NOT THINKING IN... POETRY STUFF.

YOU SHOULDN'T BE HERE.

WHO ARE YOU, LITTLE GIRL?

THE PART OF THE JUNGLE QUEEN THAT CAN'T GROW UP. KIND OF DEVELOPMENTALLY STUNTED.

THIS IS TOO PRIVATE A PLACE FOR YOU TO BE.

WHY DO I LOOK LIKE AN EAGLES' ALBUM COVER?

YOU'RE DEAD.

WELL, I FIGURED.

BUT, IF I'M SUPPOSED TO PROTECT THE JUNGLE QUEEN...

WHY SHOULDN'T I PROTECT YOU TOO?

THIS IS A HOLY PLACE. EVEN I DON'T COME HERE. GO AWAY!

NO, GO BACK THE WAY YOU CAME!

YOU'VE DRAGGED US BOTH INTO THE URRLCCH DIMENSION!

NOW WHAT WERE YOU SAYING?

ABOUT WHAT?

AND THEN I WOKE UP. TOO MANY CARTOONS AND PEZ, I GUESS.

I THINK YOU O.D.'ED.

FUNNY. BUT I KEEP SEEING THAT DOLL SHE MADE OF MR. GONE. AND BE-HEADED. THAT MUST MEAN SOMETHING!

AND THE THINGS THAT COULD BE UNDER MY MASK...

LOOK, MAXX, JUST BECAUSE THAT *FREAK* NEARLY KILLED US IS NO REASON TO *FIXATE* ON HIM...AND BECAUSE YOU *IMAGINE* YOU HAVE A *RABBIT'S HEAD* IN THIS *SAVAGE LAND* OF YOURS, IS CERTAINLY *NO REASON* TO FEAR YOU MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE ONE *HERE!*

IT'S SO *CLASSIC*, MAXX. YOU *IMAGINE* YOURSELF AS THIS *GODLIKE JUNGLE AVENGER* BECAUSE IN YOUR REAL LIFE YOU HAVE SO *LITTLE* POWER.

AND WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT, REALLY. WE *ALL* NEED SOME PLACE TO GO AWAY TO...

SOME PLACE WE CAN BE THE PEOPLE WE *SHOULD'VE* BEEN INSTEAD OF THE PEOPLE WE'VE *BECOME*.

SOME *SAFE* PLACE WHERE WE CAN ESCAPE...

...REALITY.

HIDE...

I KNOW THERE ARE THINGS I'D LIKE TO *HIDE* FROM...

MY MASK... I CAN FEEL IT CRAWLING...

PLEASE... MAKE... IT... STOP...

shhhhh

JUST *REST* NOW. IT'S OKAY... S'OKAY...

Two

I HOPE *MAXX* WILL BE ALL RIGHT AT HOME. HE'S REPAIRING A *LAMP* FOR ME. LAST TIME HE *GLUED* HIS HANDS *SHUT!* HIS *CLAWS* 'N' EVERYTHING!

BRRR! HOW CAN YOU *SLEEP* WITH THAT... *THING* HANGING AROUND YOUR HOUSE? HE'S SO... *SCARY! VIOLENT! UNCOOL!*

Aw, MAXX IS OKAY. HE'S *SAVED* MY LIFE A COUPLE OF TIMES. I THINK HE'S GOT A *GENTLE SOUL.*

YEAH. LIKE I'M CONSTANTLY CONFUSING MAXX WITH *MOTHER TERESA.*

DON'T YOU THINK *SOME* OF THAT'S IN THE EYE OF THE *BEHOLDER?*

BESIDES, I COULDN'T SLEEP *BEFORE* I MET HIM. NOT FOR YEARS. I STILL CAN ONLY GET A *COUPLE HOURS* A NIGHT.

YEAH, I'M LIKE *TOTALLY* WEIRDED OUT MYSELF AT NIGHT. I THINK IT'S ALL THIS *VIOLENCE* WE LIVE WITH. IT MAKES US JUMPY AS CATS! MOVIES... TV... VIDEO GAMES...

I MEAN HERE WE ARE, JUST HANGING OUT, GETTING A TAN--HARDLY GLAMOROUS, BUT SOMEONE COULD READ *PIN-UPS* JUST IN THE WAY I'M STANDING HERE.

MAYBE. BUT I DON'T WANT SARAH TO GROW UP IN A WORLD FILLED WITH *VIOLENCE* AND *FEAR* AND *GENDER HATRED.*

SHE'S AT THE HOSPITAL TODAY PICKING UP ONE OF HER FRIENDS WHO WAS *ATTACKED* BY THAT *SERIAL RAPIST* A FEW MONTHS AGO.

MY WOMEN'S GROUP IS GOING TO BE MONITORING TV SHOWS FOR *VIOLENT CONTENT...*

LIKE, I'M NO *CENSOR*, JULIE, BUT KIDS SEE SO MUCH *BAD STUFF* IN THAT...

"...BOX--

SEE, LOOKIT, HENRY! I TOLD YOU! THERE'S A GUY INNA BOX!

"--THEY JUST DON'T RELATE...

LOOKS LIKE HE'S BEEN DEAD A LONG TIME!

"...WHEN THEY SEE...

WHACKY COOL, PETE. HE LOOKS ALL SOFT AND GUSHY! DO YOU THINK WE C'N MOLD HIM LIKE CLAY?

"...REALITY.

THAT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA, KIDS.

WHADDA YOU CARE, YOU...YOU... YOU...?

HEY, I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THE DRAGON!

THAT'S M' PRONOLIN, SON. DON'T WEAR IT OUT.

RIGHT. I'LL TAKE OVER NOW. YOU RUN ALONG. I'M IN PURSUIT OF A *DANGEROUS PSYCHOPATH*. THE OFFICERS AND I WILL TIDY UP HERE.

HMM. THE COPS IN THIS TOWN SURE ARE *SHORT!*

BOY, THE OTHER KIDS'LL BE *DISSED* WHEN THEY FIND OUT WE MET TH' *SAVAGE DRAGON!*

YEAH, BUT MY PET *OCELOT*, *NIETZSCHE*, AN' ME WANNA KNOW *WHO'S* THE *CRAZED PSYCHOPATH* YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR...?

"HE'S A WHACKED-OUT *BLOOD JUNKIE* WITH A *MEAN STREAK*. THEY CALL HIM *MAKO*.

THERE'S THE *PLACE*...

"I PITY THE POOR *SCHMUCK* WHO COMES UP AGAINST HIM *ALONE*..."

HELLO *DINNER!*

JEEZ! A LAND SHARK! THIS STUFF ALWAYS HAPPENS JUST AFTER I GLUE MY HANDS SHUT OVER MY CLAWS! I HATE THAT!

ACME

TV STAR TREK

BOOKS

RED DRAGON

THOMAS HARRIS

SAM SHOW MEETING AT 3 P.M.

007 DR NO

PLOT

WHAM!

YOU DUCKED ON *PURPOSE*, *MAUVE-BOY!* NOW I'M GONNA DO YOU *SLOW!*

SO, YOU *REALLY* WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN *COUNTING* "ANTI-SOCIAL ACTIONS" IN SILLY COP SHOWS?

I KNOW SOME OF THESE GROUPS ARE *FANATICS*, JULIE. BUT WE *HAVE* TO DO SOMETHING.

I MEAN ONLY A COUPLE *HUGE CORPORATIONS* OWN MOST OF THE MEDIA IN THIS COUNTRY AND THEY KEEP SHOVELING INCREASING AMOUNTS OF *VIOLENCE* AT US...

"ALMOST AS IF THEY KNOW WHAT THE *WORST PART* OF US WANTS..."

WHOOSH. HOT BABY! I LIKE THIS!

YOUR *FLESH* WILL MELT OVER MY TEETH LIKE JELL-O!

SO HARD IT HITS YER TUMMY LIKE LIGHTNING?

HI, AGAIN!

I'M TALKIN' T'YOU FROM INSIDE JULIE'S HEAD, TILL I GET MY OWN BACK.

AND WHEN THEY MAKE BIG NOISES WHEN THEY HIT, THAT MAKE THE SOLES OF YER FEET TINGLE...

THIS IS WHERE SHE KEEPS ALL THE STUFF SHE LIKES THAT AIN'T NICE!

I'LL *SUCK* THE *BLOOD* FROM YOUR JAGGED, SPURTING WOUNDS AND *LAUGH!*

AIN'T IT GREAT WHEN THEY TALK DIRTY?

BUT

UUUGH. WHERE...?

GOTTA RUN!

BRUTAL...

...ANIMAL...

...INSTINCTS!

LIKE THE SPITTLE RUNNING DOWN THE BAD GUY'S TEETH, AND THEY'RE ALL POINTY AND UNEVEN! MAKES ME HOT!

DYIN' TIME!

HE'S STILL ALIVE?

AN' HERE'S WHERE TH' HERO IS TRAPPED!

THE EVIL VILLAIN IS UNSTOPPABLE!

LOOK HOW STRONG HE IS! HOW POWERFUL!

"FIGHT BACK!" WE SCREAM! "DON'T JUST TAKE IT! FIGHT BACK!"

DON'T IT MAKE Y'FEEL ALL FUNNY AND EXCITED?

!

MAYBE THIS'LL STOP HIM!

IF PEOPLE *WANT* VIOLENCE, THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO STOP THEM!

MAYBE. BUT WE CAN AT LEAST LET THEM *KNOW* HOW *MUCH* VIOLENCE SWIRLS AROUND THEM ALL THE TIME... LIKE *BUGS* IN THE AIR!

I LIKE YOUR HAIR *UP* LIKE THAT, BY THE WAY.

I GOTTA FIGHT BACK SOMEHOW!

BOY! LOOKIT HOW TENSE AN' RENDERED TH' HERO'S MUSCLES ARE! I'M REALLY GETTING INTO THIS!

GEE, IT'S STARTING TO RAIN... MAYBE WE SHOULD GO IN.

I KNOW THIS GUY! HE'S ONE OF SAVAGE DRAGON'S THIRD RATE VILLAINS!

KKRR

GREAT. I DON'T EVEN GET TO FIGHT OTHER GUYS' VILLAINS... I HAVE TO FIGHT THE LACKEYS OF OTHER GUYS' VILLAINS!

OUCH... I THINK I CUT MY FOOT BACK THERE!

BLOOD! SMELL BLOOOD!

BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD

HEY!

NO FAIR!

EAT

SORRY, TOOTH-BOY! I'M OUTTA HERE!

BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD

WHAM

BLOODBLOOD BLOODBLOOD BLOOOOO...!

IT WON'T *START.*

MAYBE THE *BATTERY'S* DEAD.

I THINK I SAW SOMETHING *MOVING* OUT THERE.

THAT'S JUST YOUR *MEDIA-INDUCED* PARANOIA TALKING.

I'M CALLING THE AUTO CLUB...

Uh-huh.

Uh-huh.

I DUNNO IF THAT GUY SPOKE *ENGLISH.*

GASP... GOTTA KEEP FAR ENOUGH AHEAD...HE... CAN'T RUN...

POOL

SPLASH

10 FT

I LOVE IT WHEN YOU THINK THE VILLAIN'S WAY FAR AWAY...

THEN HE JUST POPS UP! AN' NOW MAXX HASTA FIGHT A SHARK-GUY INNA WATER! VIOLENCE IS SOOO COOL!

MY HEAD... NO... NOT NOW!

CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG

I AM THE JUNGLE QUEEN!

RULER OF THIS WORLD!

SHE HAS DARK HAIR! I THOUGHT SHE WAS A BLOND...?

AN' HOW COME SHE LOOKS LIKE A BAD PAPERBACK COVER?

I DUNNO. THIS IS *YOUR* DREAM, MAXX!

SO HOW COME YOUR HAIR IS BLACK NOW?

AND IF YOU'RE A *LEOPARD QUEEN*, WHERE'S YOUR LEOPARD?

I HAVE BEEN CHANGED. CRUELTY AND PAIN HAVE CHANGED ME.

AND MY LEOPARD IS DEAD.

UHHH... I'M BACK.

I WAS LUCKY LAST TIME... IF HE LANDS ON ME THIS TIME I'LL BE CRUSHED!

YOU KNOW WHAT'S GREAT? WHEN THE HERO AND VILLAIN ARE BOTH REALLY MESSED UP. LIKE ALMOST TO DEATH, Y'KNOW?

I REALLY HATE THIII--!

BFD 555-1111

GNGH!

BLOOD!

BLOOD BLOOD!

BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD!

BLOODBLOOD BLOODBLOOD!

BLOOD.

BLOOD SMELL CLOSE GOOD GOTTA HAVEIT

RIGHT. LIKE THAT'S GONNA HAPPEN.

RIPTEAR RENDSUCK KILLBLOOD KILL

OKAY, SO MAYBE HE'S NOT A TOTAL LACKEY.

GNUUUHH! BLOOD CRUSH DRINK!

TOOCLOSE! TOOCLOSETO*FAIL*! KILLCRUSHH SUUCKK!

GREAT! SOUNDS LIKE THE **CLOSER** HE GETS TO HIS **PREY**, THE MORE STIMULATED HE IS!

I'M WAY, **WAY** OUT OF MY LEAGUE HERE!

BLOOD SMELL VERY CLOSE EAT TEAR REND KILL

I REALLY LIKE IT WHEN TH' HERO IS CORNERED AND TH' VILLAIN IS HAMMERIN' ON HIM. KNOW WHY?

'CAUSE THAT JUSTIFIES ANYTHING TH' HERO DOES T'HIM LATER... NO MATTER HOW GROSS!

I'M A LITTLE FASTER THAN HE IS...GOTTA KEEP AHEAD OF HIM...

I'LL DUCK IN HERE...

JUST cords

GAHH! TELEPHONE CORDS! EVERYWHERE! AND THAT SMELL!

IT'S *SOLVENT*. WE'RE CLEANING THE CORDS TODAY.

LISTEN! YOU GUYS GOTTA RUN! THERE'S A BIG HONKIN' SHARK-GUY ABOUT THREE HEARTBEATS BEHIND ME AND...

GAWD, I HATE MY LIFE...!

BLOOD LOVEBLOOD LOVEBLOOD LOVE

GEEKIE, YOU GOT NO IDEA HOW TIRED I AM OF HEARING YOU SAY THAT!

IF ONLY MY CLAWS WERE FREE...

HEY, WAIT A SEC... THE SOLVENT MUST'VE DISSOLVED THE GLUE!

MY CLAWS ARE FREE!

LOOK!T THAT! YOU C'N SEE H!S VE!NS AND R!DGED MUSCLE AND GR!STLE! BOY !S HE MAD! I BET WE'RE GONNA SEE SOMETH!NG NOW! SOMETH!NG...

..COOL.

BAM

A RANDOM SPARK MUST HAVE IGNITED THE SOLVENT THEY WERE USING, AND THUS THE GAS LINE...

LOOKY DOOKY, CHIEF :MEEP:

WE FOUND :MEEP: ONE OF THEM!

NAH. THAT'S NOT *MAKO*. THAT'S JUST SOME POOR DERELICT.

BOY, THE COPS IN THIS TOWN SURE ARE *SHORT!*

IT'S BEEN *HOURS!* NOBODY'S COMING.

SURE LOOKS THAT WAY.

MY LIFE'S A *JOKE*...IT'S ALL OVER NOW.

SUPPOSE THERE'S AN *ESCAPED CONVICT* OUT THERE! AND HE'S KILLING EVERYONE WHO COMES DOWN THIS ROAD. *THAT'S* WHAT HAPPENED TO THE REPAIR TRUCK!

HAT'S R BLOOD SUGAR TALKING.

NOW HE'S OUT THERE...

WATCHING US...WITH A LENGTH OF PIPE! GETTING CLOSER... *CLOSER...*

WAIT, I SEE... *TILLY,* **DUCK!**

CRASH

HI, JULIE. TOOK YOU A WHILE TO FIND YOUR WAY DOWN HERE.

AND YOU ARE...?

LI'L JULIE.. I'M YOUR DEEPEST MANIFESTATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS.. THE WAY YOU SAW YOURSELF WHEN YOU FIRST DEVELOPED **SELF-AWARENESS.**

Uh-huh. AND MAXX IS ***DEAD*** IN THIS HALLUCINATION?

HE CAN'T EXIST HERE. **YOU** ARE THE ONLY PSYCHIC ENTITY HERE..

AND **THESE**, OF COURSE.

AWWWooo BABY LEOPARDS!

I SUPPOSE THIS IS WHERE I LEARN THAT FOR EVERY CREATURE THAT ***DIES***, ANOTHER IS ***BORN***.

LAYING IT ON A BIT ***THICK***, AREN'T WE?

MAYBE. THEY'RE **YOUR** SYMBOLS.

BUT... HOW DID...?

YOU KNOW ABOUT THE **LEOPARD?**

YES. THAT WAS ***MAXX'S DREAM!*** AND HOW...

..IS IT YOU KNOW WHAT MAXX IS **DREAMING?**

I...KNOW ***EVERYTHING!*** THE ***OUTBACK***... THOSE ***STUPID*** ISZES...

BECAUSE YOU'RE **NOT** A PART OF **HIS** DREAM ..HE'S PART OF **YOURS.**

JUST AS THE **JUNGLE QUEEN** IS **ALSO** A PART OF YOU..

I AM THE PART OF YOU THAT ***ESCAPES***, JULIE.

I REFLECT WHAT'S INSIDE, JULIE.

I AM THE IMAGE OF STRENGTH AND INDEPENDENCE YOU FELT BEFORE YOU WERE VIOLATED.

BUT AS I ABSORB MORE TRAUMA, MISERY, AND BITTERNESS, I CHANGE.

I FEAR WHAT I AM BECOMING, JULIE.

BUT NOW THAT YOU HAVE SEEN... ALL THIS... THE WORLD CAN NEVER BE...

...THE SAME...

...SIZE AGAIN.

REFLECTING? SO SHE'S MY *SUBCONSCIOUS?* WHY IS *MAXX* DREAMING HER?

YOU THINK TOO MUCH. LET'S PLAY.

SO SHE'S MY *ID* AND YOU'RE MY *SUPEREGO?* SO WHAT'S MAXX? MY *ANIMUS?*

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. THIS **AIN'T** PSYCH 101. YOU NEED A **SPIRIT-ANIMAL** TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH IT ALL.

SPIRIT-ANIMAL, huh? LIKE A *CHIPMUNK?* HOW DO I *FIND* ONE?

YOU ALREADY HAVE.

JUST KEEP COMING BACK HERE TO PLAY WITH ME..

..AND HELP ME..

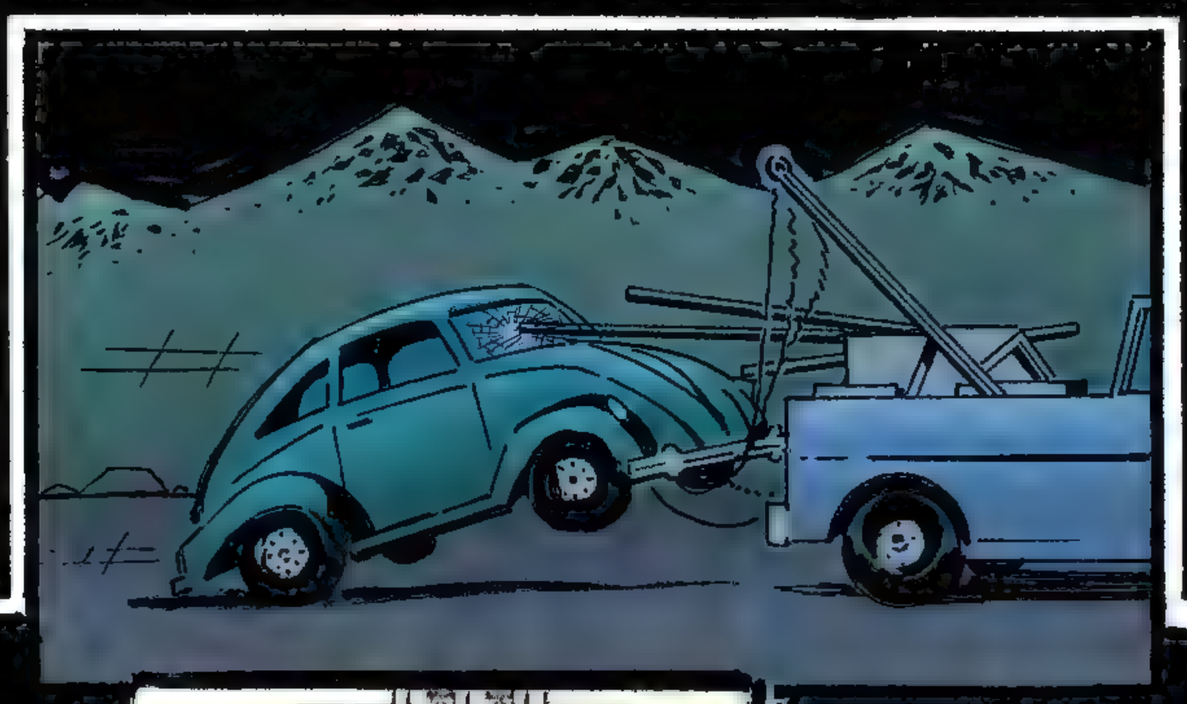
..GROW UP.

I DON'T SUPPOSE I'LL REMEMBER *ANY* OF THIS WHEN I WAKE UP?

OH, NO. THIS STUFF IS BURIED SO DEEPLY, IT'LL TAKE YOU **YEARS** TO WORK THROUGH!

SO THAT'S THE STORY. EVERYTHING'S ABOUT THE SAME...

OH YEAH. THERE **WAS** A **MANIAC** THAT NIGHT. IT WAS THE IDIOT DRIVING THE **TOW TRUCK**, WHO KNOCKED A **HOLE** THROUGH THEIR WINDSHIELD.



FUNNY THING, JULIE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A HEADACHE, AND SHE'S BEEN SLEEPING LIKE A **BABY** EVER SINCE.

SARAH BROUGHT GLORIE OUT OF THE HOSPITAL. THERE ARE SOME SCARS, BUT GLORIE SEEMS... ALMOST OKAY. I DUNNO.

I WONDER HOW MAKO FOUND ME? IT WAS LIKE MR. GONE WAS STILL CRUISING AROUND. BUT HE'S DEAD.

OF COURSE, I WOKE UP IN A PATROL CAR FILLED WITH **ISZES**. THAT WAS BAD. I HAD TO BREAK A PANE OF BULLET PROOF GLASS TO ESCAPE.

SO, WHO KNOWS? I KNOW I DON'T.

I ENDED UP BACK IN MY BOX IN THE ALLEY.

LOOKS LIKE THINGS ARE GONNA GET A LOT MORE DANGEROUS FROM HERE ON OUT.

ANYBODY WHO CAN HIRE MAKO TO KILL ME, CAN SEND GUYS EVEN TOUGHER.

HMMM...

DID YOU KNOW THEY CANCELLED CHEERS?

YEAH. JULIE TOLD ME THE OTHER DAY.

I KNOW ALL THOSE PEOPLE WERE PLAYED BY ACTORS AND STUFF, AND THEY ALL GOT NEW JOBS.

EVEN SO, IT'S LIKE THEY ALL DIED FOR NO REASON.

JUST TURNED AWAY FOR A SECOND AND THEY WERE GONE.

EVERYBODY DIES.

Chapter Three

MEDICAL EXAMINER'S LAB.

DO YOU ♪ FEEL LIKE WE DO...OOOH... ♫

'CORDIN' TO THE POLICE, THIS GOOD OL' BOY'S STREET NAME WAS *TEEGO*...

THEY FOUND 'IM IN A *BOX* IN SOME *ALLEY*... PROB'LY EXPLAINS WHY 'IS CLOTHES *SMELL* SO BAD!

THESE DEAD FELLAS IS *SUPPOSED* T'BE PEELED WHEN I GET 'EM!

S'FUNNY... ALMOST SEEMS LIKE 'IS BODY'S *CHANGIN'* SHAPE TH' CLOSER I GET T' TH' SKIN--

--WHAT TH'--!

THAT--THAT AIN'T *RIGHT!* THAT AIN'T WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE WHEN HE WAS BRUNG IN!

IT'S--

--IT'S--

--UNNATURAL!

Eh?

CRREEEEEAAK

MEEP!

Z

CRAP. ON!

MAXX! ARE YOU *OUT* THERE? THE BATHROOM DOOR IS *STUCK*, MAXX! ARE YOU *ASLEEP*? *MAXX...!*

YOU KNOW, JULIE, I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING. LIKE I FORGOT SOMETHING BACK AT THE HOUSE.

PROBABLY NOTHING IMPORTANT.

YEAH. WELL, THIS IS IT. THE OUTBACK. THE PLACE I'VE BEEN TELLIN' YOU ABOUT ALL THESE MONTHS. THE PLACE YOU SAID WAS A FIGMENT OF MY DISEASED BRAIN. AND NOW YOU'RE HERE. YOU C'N SEE IT. YOU'RE STANDING RIGHT HERE...

AND I SUPPOSE NOW YOU EXPECT ME TO FALL ON MY KNEES AND BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR EVER HAVING DOUBTED YOU?

UM...NOT IN SO MANY WORDS. AND CERTAINLY NOT IN THAT TONE OF VOICE.

GOOD. 'CAUSE I'M HAVING A BAD DAY.

YOU KNOW, EVERYTHING SEEMED A LOT BIGGER THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE.

LIKE THOSE THINGS. I KNOW WHAT THEY ARE. THEY'RE SEUSSADONS. HALF-RABBIT AND HALF... SOMETHING...? THEY HOP.

WELL, *DUH*. I COULD'VE TOLD YOU THAT!

WHAT ARE *THOSE* THINGIES?

WHAT THINGIES?

THOSE. THE LITTLE ICKS YOU'RE GRINDING TO JELLY.

LOOKS LIKE LITTLE BITTY WHITE ISZES.

Y'KNOW, IF WE'RE *NOT* DREAMING, DO YOU SUPPOSE WE CAN GET *KILLED* HERE?

OH, ABSOLUTELY. I'M SURE OF IT.

THERE'S A HAPPY THOUGHT.

BUT WE WON'T DIE HERE. I GUESS WE'RE THE BIGGEST THINGS AROUND HERE.

Uh...

TAP TAP TAP

GUESS AGAIN.

TIMMY! WHERE'S TIMMY?

HE WAS MY ONLY FRIEND AND NOW HE'S GONE! AND YOU KNOW SOMETHING! YOU TOOK HIM!

GIVE HIM BACK!

HEY!

WELL, JULIE'S MY ONLY FRIEND! AND IF YOU HURT HER I'LL...

WILL YOU GUYS KNOCK IT OFF! GEEZ!
THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE, LIKE, MY CHANCE TO WORK THROUGH A BUNCH OF CATHARTIC CRAP!
I DIDN'T COME HERE TO HAVE YOU GUYS SCREW IT UP BY ACTING LIKE A COUPLE OF POSTER CHILDREN FOR TESTOSTERONE POISONING!
TRUST ME, THIS IS NOT SCORING YOU POINTS!
AND YOU, MISTER "I'M TOO GOOD TO HAVE NOSTRILS," WE DO NOT HAVE YOUR "TIMMY," WE DO NOT WANT YOUR "TIMMY," AND FURTHERMORE...
UH-OH.
...LOOK!
ISZ. LOTSA THEM.
EVEN AT THAT SIZE A BILLION OF THEM C'D SMOTHER US! YOU GUYS RUN FOR THAT CLIFF!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME. I'LL STAY RIGHT...

...HERE.
SO MUCH FOR CHIVALRY.
WELL, THEY DID THAT QUICKLY. NEXT TIME, I'LL TELL THEM TO DIG ME A HOLE AND FILL IT WITH BUTTERMILK FOR MY BATH.
CHUNG CHUNG CHUNG
THERE DON'T SEEM TO BE ANY ISZ IN THIS DIRECTION.
I DON'T KNOW WHY...
...SOMETHING'S DRAWING ME...
...OUT THERE.
BUT IT'S VERY INTRIGUING...
THOUGHT I SAW SOMETHING...
GUESS I WAS WRONG.

THE ELMER A. CRAFT HIGH SCHOOL ART DEPARTMENT.

I HATE *INVENTORY.* I *HATE* MRS. BRUSSLES.

ONE STUPID BOX... TWO STUPID BOXES... THREE...

LIFE SUCKS, HUH?

DOWN HERE, KIDDO.

HI, SARAH. I'M A MAGIC PIECE OF TALKING CLAY.

RIGHT.

NO, REALLY.

I CAN HELP YOU IF YOU SNEAK ME INTO JULIE WINTERS' HOUSE.

YOU KNOW ABOUT JULIE?

YOU MUST GET AROUND FOR A PIECE OF CLAY.

WELL, YEAH...FOR A PIECE OF CLAY.

WHY SHOULD I BETRAY JULIE FOR YOU?

"I THINK IT'S PRETTY IMPORTANT FOR A WRITER TO KNOW JUST HOW ROTTEN SHE CAN BE...".

GET OUT OF MY HEAD!

CLAY

YOU'LL BE BACK...AND WE CAN TALK AND PLAY GAMES, I DON'T KNOW...

AND ON THE STAIRWELL LEADING TO JULIE WINTERS' APARTMENT...

TIMMY.

TIMMY... WAIT.

TIMMY... WHERE DID YOU GO...?

YOU! WHAT DID YOU DO WITH...?

BUBBLE BATH CRAP-ON! STYLE

SUDDENLY, EVERYTHING CHANGES!

I AM THE MAXX! HE WHO IS PROTECTOR OF THIS LAND!

AND YOU ARE A POWERFULLY BUILT STRANGER, WHO HAS COME TO CHALLENGE MAXX, FOR WE ARE THE TWO BIGGEST CREATURES IN THIS WORLD!

GUESS AGAIN.

ANY CLUE AS TO WHO THIS GUY IS?

HE WOULD BE AN ISZ, EXCEPT THEY ARE SMALL, AND LIVE UNDERGROUND AND ONLY ATTACK IN GROUPS. AND ARE COLORED LIGHT GRAY AND...

RUN! DON'T TALK!

YES, MAXX WILL RUN. MAXX WILL LOSE THIS GIANT ISZ IN THE GRASSLANDS OF HIS BELOVED PANGAEA!

MAXX WILL RACE ACROSS THESE CLIFFS AND PLATEAUS, LEAPING LIKE A POWERFUL GOATFROG!

STAY! MAXX WILL LEAD THE MONSTER AWAY WITH HIS WILDERNESS CUNNING!

BOP!

RIGHT. LIKE THAT'S REALLY GONNA HAPPEN!

I KNOW YOU'RE STILL OUT THERE, MAXX. I CAN HEAR YOU MOVING AROUND.

YOU *BETTER* BE OUT THERE, MAXX.

SO. DO YOU BRING ALL YOUR DATES TO THIS ABANDONED OVER-PASS, SARAH?

HEH. HEH...

JUST KIDDING.

LOOK, JUST BECAUSE I BROUGHT YOU OUT HERE DOESN'T MEAN I'M GONNA BETRAY HER.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WANT TO HURT HER? MAYBE I JUST WANT TO BE HER FRIEND.

YEAH, RIGHT.

WELL, I KNEW THAT WOULDN'T FLY.

OKAY, LET'S CUT THE CRAP, SARAH. YOU GET ME IN THAT HOUSE AND I CAN GET YOU--

SHUT UP! STOP SCREWING WITH MY HEAD!

I KNOW THINGS, SARAH. I KNOW ABOUT THE LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE OF PEOPLE. I KNOW ABOUT THE SECRET FAULT LINES OF THEIR SOULS.

SEE, SARAH, EVERYBODY SNAPS.

LOOK AT YOU. . .TALKING TO A PIECE OF CLAY.

AND EVERYBODY HAS A SPIRIT FRIEND WHO HELPS THEM OVER THE ROUGH SPOTS.

AN ANIMAL, USUALLY.

YOURS MIGHT BE A HORSE. A HUGE, SPIRITED ARABIAN!

I CAN SEE HIM NOW...PASSING LIKE FIRE THROUGH THE MAGNETIC WALL THAT YOU'VE BUILT AROUND YOUR SOUL.

IT'S BUILT OF ALL THE MEAN, NASTY, NEGATIVE THINGS PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT YOU. THEY'RE JUST IDEAS...WORDS...YOU HEAR THEM LONG ENOUGH, AND EVENTUALLY YOU BUY IT.

BUT SUPPOSE YOU KNOW HOW TO FIND YOUR ANIMAL, THEN IT WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE, HOW TO

TEAR

DOWN

THAT

WALL!

I CAN LEAD YOU RIGHT TO THAT HORSE, SARAH.

SO, WHEN DO WE GO TO JULIE'S?

MAXX! STOP HIDING AND RUN!

MAXX DOES NOT HIDE! MAXX IS RESTING BENEATH THE DECAYING BODY OF THIS SMALL AIRWHALE!

NOW, MAXX RUNS!

GOOD PLAN.

MAXX WILL SEIZE THE SPLIT TAIL OF THIS SLEEPING SCORPION AND...

SWING FOR FREEDOM! EVERY SINEW BURSTING...

HE EXPERTLY JUDGES THE DISTANCE TO THE TREES AND GRABBING A BRANCH...

SPLASH

HOW REFRESHING! THE BUBBLING WATERS OF THE MALIJOO... THE SPRING OF LIFE... HAVE REVIVED ME.

NOW IT IS TIME TO END THIS, WITH THE FLASHING BLADE DJARNBAR, WHICH I DRAW FROM THIS STONE!

BACK, MONSTER! MAXX WOULD NOT SLAY YOU, BUT WOULD RATHER BE YOUR TINY FRIEND!

NO MATTER THE PROVOCATION I WILL NOT... OH, HELL!

EAT STEEL!

BAD ISZ!

HE PUSHED MAXX TOO FAR!

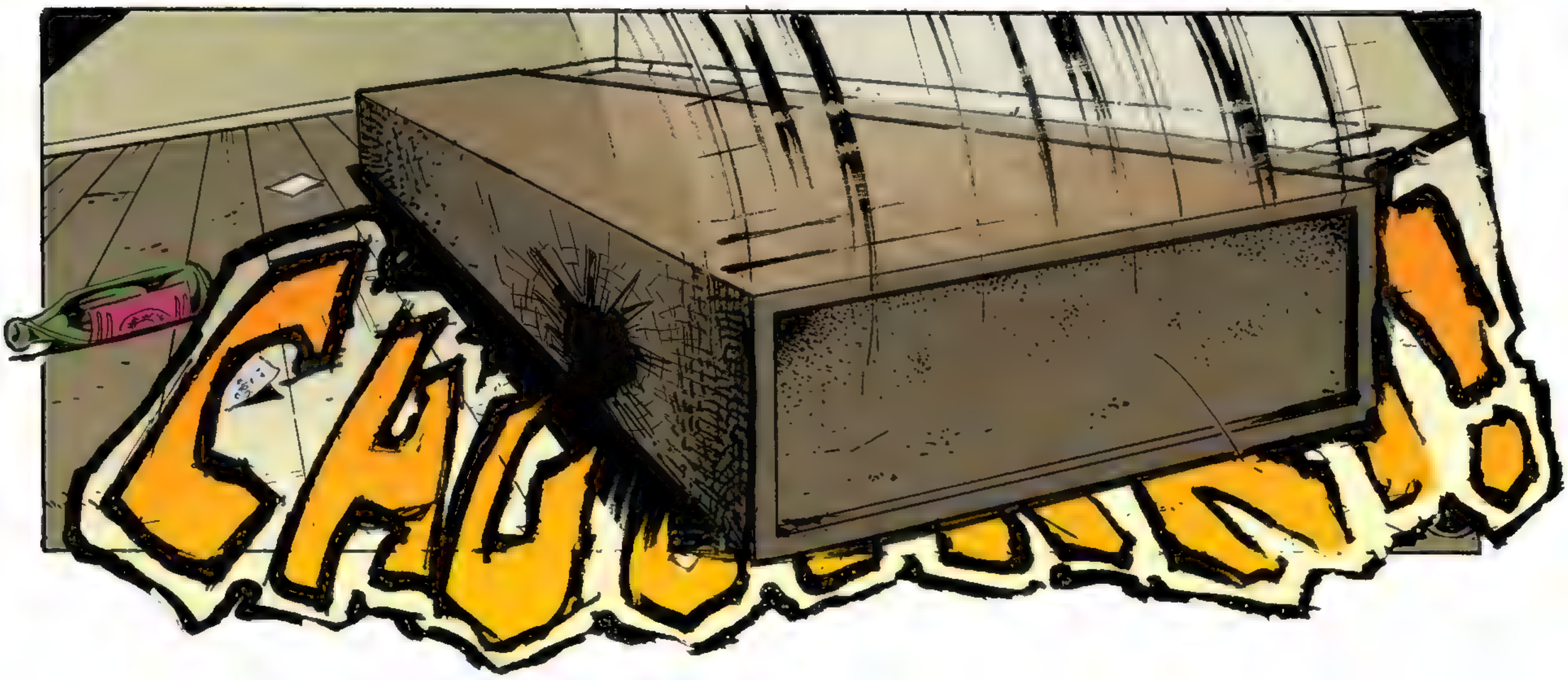
WILL YOU RUN?

Y'KNOW, MAXX, IT'S BEEN REAL INTEREST-ING MEETING YOU.

I DON'T USUALLY GET TO BE THE SMARTEST GUY IN THE ROOM!

NOW WATCH CLOSELY.

I'M ABOUT TO MAKE ALL OUR PROBLEMS DISAPPEAR!



MAXX! ARE YOU OKAY?

MAXX FINE.

ISZ FINE TOO!

AND BURY MONSTER IN FLOOD OF LAVA!

DON'T WORRY! MAXX KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING!

MAXX WILL SWING OPEN BRASS TEMPLE DOORS...

MAXX, YOU IDIOT! IT'S A FLOOD OF TAPES!

UHH. I GUESS SHE'S NOT HOME.

YOU'RE SURE YOU GOT THE RIGHT PLACE?

OUCH! CAREFUL, SARAH. I'M A SENSITIVE PIECE OF CLAY!

WILL YOU SHUT UP?! I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY I'M DOING THIS!

MY WORLD SUCKS, BUT AT LEAST IT'S KIND OF NORMAL...

AND ONCE I GET RID OF YOU, IT'LL BE...

...SANE...

SARAH.

SARAH?

YOU STOPPED TALKING, SARAH. I CAN'T HEAR YOU.

I AM INSIDE, RIGHT?

YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED A JOKE ON OL' MR. CLAY, HAVE YOU?

CLICK

YOU BETTER NOT'VE!

SARAH!

WHAT A FUNNY LITTLE HOUSE! JUST LIKE THE ONE I MADE OUT OF CLAY AND POPSICLE STICKS WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL!

SHE'S STARTING TO REMEMBER! NOT NOW! IT'S TOO SOON!

IF WE ALL RETURN TO "NORMAL", I'LL PROBABLY END UP WITHOUT A HEAD!

BUT IF I NAIL THAT THING WITH A POISON DART...

...IT'LL BUY ME SOME TIME.

I REMEMBER NOW! I WAS A JUNGLE QUEEN! RULER OF A VAST DOMAIN! AND WHENEVER EVIL APPEARED I WOULD FIGHT IT.

IT'S JUST LIKE I REMEMBER IT!

NO! NO! NO!

AND I HAD A PET BUNNY. BUT HE DIED.

NO TIME LEFT! I HAVE TO DO IT NOW!

SUDDENLY...

AND ELSEWHERE...

PITT! PULL ME UP. PITT!

THERE ARE A LOT OF ISZES DOWN THERE, PITT. DON'T JUST STARE AT THEM! PULL ME UP!

TIMMY. THEY ARE ALL... TIMMY...

BUT... WHERE ARE TIMMY'S...

...EYES?

WHAT? SNAP OUT OF IT, PITT!

GRAB MY HAND! PULL ME UP! DON'T JUST STAND THERE SAYING "TIMMY"!

KILL!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE!

THE BURNING, BARBED RING OF MEMORY!

Chapter four

This eye is too HIGH...

This One Too LOW...

...JAW is UN-even.....

IMperfections of a JUNGLE Queen

The clay told me to listen to the horse... that it was my spirit animal... God, that sounds so LAME! "The CLAY told me"... but it's true!

No crazier than the stupid architect who sculpted all these animal heads on the side of this building.

I think I like the SQUIRREL better.

At least then a squirrel would TELL me the stupid secrets of the universe!

Instead of me just standing here hour after hour, waiting!

Life is pretty pathetic when even your hallucinations LIE to you.

Maybe I have to get closer.

I even put the clay's BAG in Julie's house...

Which is where I saw those two itty-bitty SUPER-HEROES fighting that blue marsh-mallow with TEETH...

Which is why I'm probably CRAZY!

AND ELSEWHERE, DEEP WITHIN THAT SAVAGE LAND KNOWN AS THE OUTBACK...

JULIE WINTERS HEARS THE SUBTLE RUSTLE OF GRASSES...FEELS LEOPARD SKIN AGAINST HER FLESH... AND INSTINCTS SHE NEVER REALIZED SHE HAD KICK ON!

WITH STEEL-SPRING SPEED AND STRENGTH SHE TWISTS, RIPPING FREE ONE OF THE SUPPORT POLES FROM THE MASSIVE STONE FERTILITY SYMBOL...

AND HURLING IT LIKE A SPEAR INTO THE VITALS OF THE APPROACHING PREDATOR!

FSSSSS

arghs

CHUK

THE CRAZED SPECKLED STALKER REGAINS ITS FEET, PANTING WITH SHOCK...

...AND CRASHES INTO THE MINIATURE JUNGLE SURROUNDING THEM WITH A DAMP SCREAM.

"WELL, COOL," THINKS JULIE, HER MIND ABLAZE WITH PRIMITIVE PASSIONS.

Y!KES! THAT L!TTLE CREAM-F!LLED BL!NTZ !S GO!NG NAT!VE! I BETTER BOOK!

MALACHI, TERRIBLE SPECKLED STALKER OF THE PLAIN AND, UNTIL THIS MORNING, THE GREATEST GIANT IN THE OUTBACK, HAS TIME FOR BUT ONE THOUGHT...

"SHARP STICK," HE THINKS. AND DIES.

BUT EVEN THE TINY SCRAPINGS, MADE BY THE DIMINUTIVE MR. GONE AS HE CLAMBERS OVER THE HARDENED EARTH, ARE LIKE DRUMBEATS TO THE SUDDENLY PRETERNATURAL HEARING OF JULIE WINTERS...

...WHO LEAPS LIKE A GREAT JUNGLE CAT!

CRAP!

HER HAND CLOSES LIKE A HAWK'S TALON...

AND THE DIMINUTIVE DASTARD IS IMMOBILIZED...

AND AT HER DUBIOUS MERCY!

YOU! I ALWAYS *KNEW* YOU WEREN'T DEAD! NOW I WANT THE *TRUTH!*

TALK T'DESCARTES, TOOTS!

AND YET ELSEWHERE, IN THE SUDDENLY **HUGE** APARTMENT OF JULIE WINTERS...

MAXX IS TRIUMPHANT OVER THE RAVENOUS PIRANOSAURUS! HE IS TRULY LORD OF THE JUNGLE! AS IS HIS BROTHER, PITT!

GIVE IT A **REST**, MAXX. THERE'S SOMETHING NUTS HERE, AND I MEAN T'SCOPE IT OUT!

BUT FIRST WE MUST RID OURSELVES OF THIS DAEMONIC BEAST! AND MAXX HAS A PLAN!

BIG GULP

OH, GOD.

NO, THIS BE GOOD PLAN.

UHHHH

MAXX, WHY IS IT I GOTTA BE OUT HERE, SUPPLYING... UHH... ALL TH' MUSCLE?

WHILE YOU SIT BACK THERE?

MAXX IS STEADYING.

YEAH, RIGHT.

UH, MAXX...? I THINK THE DINGUS IS WRIGGLIN' FREE!

BROTHER PITT NOT WORRY! MAXX IS COMING!

NO, MAXX... WHATEVER YOU DO...FOR GOD'S SAKE...

DON'T LET

GO

OOPS!

BROTHER PITT LOOKED MAD AS HE SAIL AWAY.

WHO'S OUT THERE? I CAN HEAR SOMEONE...

MAXX?

ARE YOU *OUT* THERE, MAXX? I'M STILL *LOCKED* IN THIS BATHROOM.

YOU'VE GOT TO *SAVE* ME, MAXX!

I AM COMING, JULIE!

MAXX... YOUR *MASK*...

...IT'S FALLEN...

YOU'RE...

...YOU'RE A...

OH GOD

WOW!

LOOK AT THOSE IZZES EAT!

I SURE AM GLAD YOU SNAPPED OUT OF IT AND PULLED ME UP AT THE LAST SECOND!

ME TOO.

OOF.

HEY! THAT'S PRETTY GOOD!

WHEN YOU GET HELP, YOU CAN COME *BACK* FOR ME.

RIGHT, MAXX?

MAXX?

GODDAM YOU, MAXX!

NOTHING'S HAPPENING.

NO *INSIGHTS*, NO *FLASHBACKS*, NO NEAT EXPLANATIONS OF WHY MY LIFE IS SO MISERABLE. NO *NOTHING*.

WHAT KIND OF LAME *SPIRIT ANIMAL* ARE YOU ANYWAY?

I MEAN, I'M HERE. I'M LISTENING. *SAY* SOMETHING!

OR ARE YOU JUST PART OF THE *USUAL* CON, WHERE A HORSE TELLS YOU, "*LIFE IS IMPORTANT*," "*GET HIGH ON LIFE*," "*HORSES TALK*", AND IT'S ALL JUST CRAP?

'COURSE THE ONLY THING *STUPIDER* THAN A TALKING GRANITE HORSE IS A GIRL WHO LOOKS TO ONE FOR ANSWERS.

MAXX...?

MAXX... DID YOU ALWAYS...

UNDER THE MASK, I MEAN?

IS THIS THE *SECRET*...WHY YOU WERE SENT HERE?

OR IS THIS SOME KIND OF AWFUL *JOKE*?

FOR GOD'S SAKE, MAXX, *ANSWER* ME!

SUDDENLY, HER BRAIN, SENSITIVE AS A SPLAYED WOUND, IS POUNDED BY IMAGES.

WHAT...

...ARE YOU...

...DOING...

...TO ME...?

SHE IS STILL IN THE BATHROOM, WITH THAT TWISTED, LEERING... LONG-EARED...

AND HERE, SEEING THE...

...THE...

...THE LAMP?

THE SPRAY OF WATER DROPS OVER THE SLICK, BLUE SURFACE, THE PAIN, THE BLOOD...

SHOWING YOU THE TRUTH.

HOW... DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT? HOW DO... YOU KNOW ABOUT *EVERYTHING?*

VERY SIMPLE.

A PART OF ME IS PROJECTED INTO THE OTHER WORLD... INTO YOUR HOME. I'M THERE RIGHT NOW... LISTENING.

THAT'S HOW I KNOW THAT THE OUTBACK IS GETTING SMALLER AND SMALLER...

STOP THIS! IT *HURTS!*

AH. AND I THOUGHT THIS WAS WHAT YOU WANTED. DID YOU SEE IT? BEHIND THE MASK?

"WHILE THE WORLD OF THE CITY IS GROWING! IT'S ALL UNBALANCED!

"WHEN YOU SPOKE TO YOUR OTHER SELVES YESTERDAY, YOU DAMAGED THE BARRIERS!

"I'D EXPLAIN MORE, BUT YOU HAVE A NASTY HABIT OF CUTTING OFF MY HEAD WHEN I TELL YOU THE TRUTH!"

SO DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE SO AFRAID OF WET, BLUE...

URNGLK
SHUT UP.

PANT PANT PANT PANT PANT
PANT PANT PANT PANT

I WONDER IF THIS MEANS I'VE REALLY BEEN HANGING OFF THE STRUT OF A GOODYEAR BLIMP FOR THE LAST 15 MILES?

DO YOU KNOW HOW HARD IT IS TO CATCH AN AIRWHALE GOING IN THIS DIRECTION?

THUMP!

GREAT. NOW WE'RE STUCK IN A MILLION MILES OF PRIMORDIAL WILDERNESS.

BITCH, BITCH, BITCH.

UH-OH

PLEASE TELL ME IT'S NOT SO.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE TELL ME I HAVEN'T BEEN SITTING UP HERE LIKE AN *IDIOT* FOR GOD KNOWS HOW LONG...

MISS JULIE...? WHAT ARE YOU *DOING* UP THERE?

C'MON. I'LL GET YOU HOME.

OH, GOD, SARAH...

I'M *FORGETTING* IT ALL!

WHAT THE HELL YOU STARIN' AT, KID?

BUT I'M ALMOST SURE I KILLED SOMEBODY.

SURE YOU DID. IT'S OKAY...

WHEN YOU'RE FEELING BETTER, I WANNA TELL YOU 'BOUT THIS HORSE...

HORSE...? NO, IT'S MORE LIKE THIS--

Shhh...

SARAH...? DO YOU SEE MY *FAUX OTTOMAN* LYING ON THE SIDEWALK?

YES.

NO.

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE, IS IT?

GOD, WHAT A DAY...

THAT SARAH'S A NICE KID.

MAN, SOMETHING *STINKS.*

UH-HUH.

"SO HOW MUCH OF IT DO YOU FIGURE WAS TRUE?"

"AT LEAST ONE OF THE PITTS, THE ISZ. I DUNNO.

"HOW MUCH CAN *YOU* REMEMBER NOW?"

"ABOUT HAVING A *PART* OF HIMSELF IN THIS ROOM? DEFINITELY NOT. I CAN FEEL HIM IN HERE...SOMEWHERE."

"SOME. ENOUGH. DO YOU THINK GONE WAS LYING?"

"YEAH... WHERE IS THAT SMELL COMING FROM?"

So, here I am again, Mr. Ed. This is the THIRD week. I dunno...

Suddenly it happens.

In a single word the horse's voice reveals EVERYTHING.

It's not about the CLAY or a HORSE... it's not about anyone in school, Mom, Dad, Julie or even Maxx.

Oh God... I feel like my insides are turning to jelly...

I'm starting to shake...

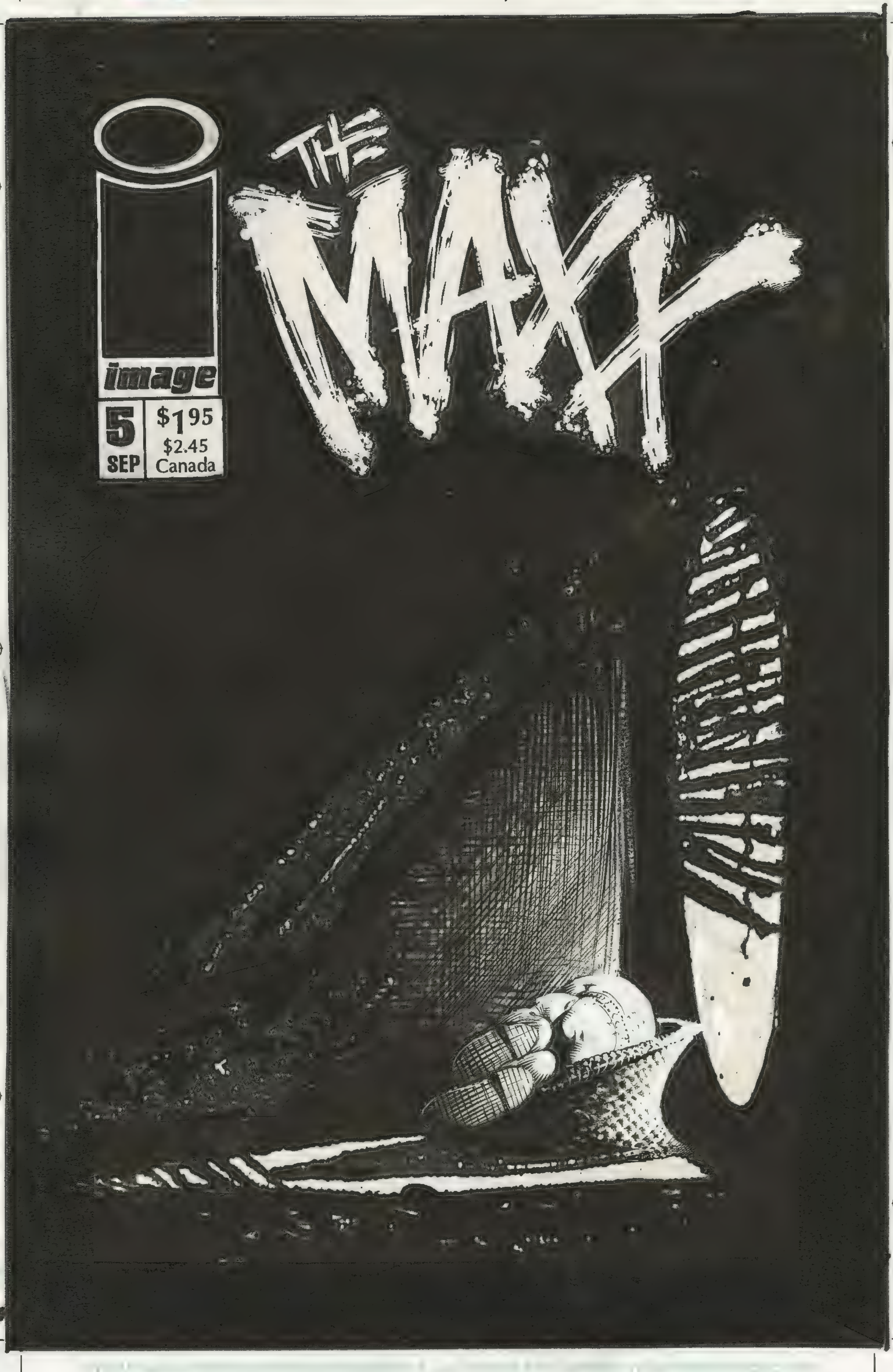
...letting my guard down too fast... I need time...

...it's too much... ripping right through me...

Maybe that's why I'm crying. It's all so real now. It's all REAL!

NEXT ISSUE: HEAD TRIPPING AND JUNGLE ROT

Art Gallery
featuring
Sam Kieth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WAR VS. PEACE

ULP.

THE WAY
GET

BLOOD LOVEBLOOD LOVEBLOOD LOVE
GEEKIE, YOU GOT NO IDEA HOW TIRED I AM OF HEARING YOU SAY THAT!
IF ONLY MY CLAWS WERE FREE...
HEY, WAIT A SEC... THE SOLVENT MUST'VE DISSOLVED THE GLUE!
MY CLAWS ARE FREE!
LOOK!T THAT! YOU C'N SEE H!S VE!NS AND R!DGED MUSCLE AND GR!STLE! BOY !S HE MAD! I BET WE'RE GONNA SEE SOMETH!NG NOW! SOMETH!NG...

GUESS AGAIN.

GRAB MY HAND! PULL ME UP! DON'T JUST STAND THERE SAYING "TIMMY"!
KILL!
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE!
THE BURNING, BARBED RING OF MEMORY!

The classic comic by Sam Kieth and William Messner-Loebs is back in this remastered edition that collects issues #5–8 of *The Maxx* with all-new colors by Ronda Pattison.

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